

## WINTER SAFETY 2011-2012

### THE USAG GARMISCH SAFETY OFFICE INFORMS:

#### WINTER TIRE SAFETY

##### Guidelines for Winter:

##### Winter Tire Laws in Germany

Germany has always had requirements for winter tires during the ice and snow season, but in November 2010, those requirements turned into a much more specific federal law for all of Germany. Here's what you need to know...



Are you ready to drive in these conditions in Germany? Photo: © Hyde Flippo

Germany's new winter tire law came about after a German court ruled in the case of a motorist who had protested a fine levied for not having snow tires on his car. In July 2010, the court determined that the current law was indeed too vague and that the term *geeignete Bereifung*

("appropriate set of tires") failed to actually specify the use of winter tires. The man did not have to pay the fine.

Also see: *The requirements for ice and snow removal in Germany!*

## The Law Regarding Snow Tires

In November 2010, responding to the court's decision, the *Bundestag*, Germany's parliament, passed a new federal law that is much more specific about winter tires. It also doubles the fines for drivers caught without snow tires or who have an accident in winter conditions without snow tires on their vehicle.

### Von O bis O

Most German motorists have long known the old rule of thumb for putting snow tires on the car: "von O bis O." The term "from O to O" is short for "from October to Easter" (*von Oktober bis Ostern*). It is a recommendation that one should make the change from regular tires to snow tires in October, and leave them on until Easter.

The new German law does not set any time limits, but it does clearly state that under icy conditions (*bei Glatteis, Schneeglätte, Schneematsch, Eis- und Reifglätte*) you must not drive without snow tires on your vehicle. So, since it's difficult to predict the weather, for all practical purposes, the old "von O bis O" rule still applies.

The new law also spells out what a "winter tire" is. Specifically, it is an *M+S-Reifen*, a mud-and-snow tire that has an official M+S (*Matsch und Schnee*) marking on it. (M+S tires do not have to be "winter" tires. All-year or all-weather M+S tires also qualify.) The German automobile club ADAC recommends going a step further and getting tires with the "three-peak-mountain" seal, an indication of snow tires that meet the highest standards. ADAC also makes another recommendation that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the law. While the *Straßenverkehrsordnung* (StVO) requires a minimum snow tire tread depth (*Profiltiefe*) of 1.6 mm, ADAC ups that to 4.0 mm.

## Fines

If the police catch you driving in winter conditions without M+S tires, you'll have to pay a fine (*Bußgeld*) of 40 euros – plus a point against you in Flensburg.\* If you are involved in an accident or you block traffic in icy conditions without M+S tires, the fine goes up to 80 euros and a point against you in Flensburg.

**\*Flensburg** - The *Verkehrszentralregister des Kraftfahrt-Bundesamtes* in Flensburg is a central register of all traffic violations in Germany. Various driving offenses are assigned a number of points and recorded in a databank in the northern German town of Flensburg. A driver with up to three points need not worry, but after accumulating four or more points, various sanctions take effect, ranging from remedial driving school to loss of your license to drive.

**In Austria, winter tires are mandatory from November 1 to April 15, all-year or all-weather M+S tires also qualify, but required to have a tire tread depth 4.0 – 5.0 mm – fines are between 35 to 5000 Euros!**

## Rental Cars

The snow tire law applies to all drivers, even if they do not own the vehicle! That means if you are renting a car in Germany in the winter, make sure it has M+S tires. The law also applies to motorbikes, trucks and buses.

For more about driving in Germany, see our [Driving in Germany](#) pages.